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Alaska National Guard

*Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

019-003

January 17, 2019

By 2nd Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel

Joint Force Headquarters, Alaska National Guard

Alaska Guardsmen reaffirm service commitment during regional biathlon competition

MIDWAY, Utah — After skiing across the finish line of the 2019 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition, two Alaska Army National Guardsmen rose their right hand and reaffirmed their commitment to help defend their state and nation at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center here Jan. 12.

With the snow-covered Wasatch Mountains as their backdrop, 1st Sgt. Travis Kulp, D Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment, and Staff Sgt. Heather Percy, 297th Military Police Co., recited the Oath of Enlistment in front of their teammates at the site of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games.

"It's opportunities like this that have kept me in the National Guard – doing something cool and different from the usual," said Percy, who has spent 18 years in combined NG, Reserve and active service as a combat medic. "I have always wanted to visit Soldier Hollow since living amongst Olympians in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. It's historic, beautiful and filled with challenging hills."

Alaska Air and Army Guardsmen raced on the same hills that the 2019 International Biathlon Union World Cup Biathlon tour will stop at in less than a month. With a seven-pound, .22-caliber rifle strapped to their backs, they skied a series of laps and then fired at five, 4.5-inch targets from either a standing or prone position.

Both Kulp and Percy uphold that biathlon is an ideal sport for Alaska Guardsmen, as it exemplifies training with over snow movement, marksmanship and teamwork.

"Biathlon incorporates fitness, endurance, discipline, mental fortitude and preparation," said Percy, competing at her first biathlon competition despite skiing since 2001. "Things change constantly – the weather, snow, wind, equipment, and require us to adapt and overcome."

Team Alaska joined fellow Guard competitors from California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming for three days of official training and sprint and pursuit races.

The Alaska men's team took home an overall second place award for their speed on skis and accuracy with a rifle. Individual winners included Sgt. 1st Class Adam Schwartz, third-place finish in the novice men's category, Private 1st Class Everett Darrow, first-place in the men's category, and Maj. David Cunningham, third-place in the men's master's category.

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“It was a great job for a growing team made possible by newer soldiers challenging themselves by skiing and shooting at a higher level – reinforced by new teammates who are taking the time and energy to learn the nuances of biathlon on their own,” said Kulp, the Alaska team captain who has 21 years of service in the Guard and joined team in 2012.

“The team is comprised of wonderful members from a variety of backgrounds,” said Percy. “I have learned so much from the more experienced team members and have so many takeaways to work on and improve.”

Team Alaska’s top four men and four women will have the opportunity to compete at the 2019 Chief, National Guard Bureau Biathlon Championships Feb. 22 – Mar. 1 at the Camp Ethan Allen Training Site, Jericho, Vt.

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.) <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/307468/alaska-guardsmen-reaffirm-service-commitment-during-regional-biathlon-competition>



Alaska Army Guard Staff Sgt. Heather Percy, 297th Military Police Company, recites the Oath of Enlistment during an extension ceremony presided over by Maj. David Cunningham after completing the 2019 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, Utah, Jan. 12. The Alaska National Guard Biathlon Team gathered for the ceremony after completing three days of official training and sprint and pursuit races at the southeastern-most part of the Wasatch Mountain State Park where the Nordic events were held during the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Balinda O’Neal Dresel)

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Alaska Army Guard 1st Sgt. Travis Kulp, D Company, 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry Regiment recites the Oath of Enlistment during an extension ceremony presided over by Maj. David Cunningham after completing the 2019 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, Utah, Jan. 12. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Alaska Air and Army Guardsmen compete in the 2019 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, Utah, Jan. 11. Team Alaska joined fellow Guard competitors from California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming for three days of official training and sprint and pursuit races at the southeastern-most part of the Wasatch Mountain State Park where the Nordic events were held during the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Alaska Army Guard Staff Sgt. Heather Percy, left, 297th Military Police Company, and Sgt. 1st Class Adam Schwartz, Recruiting and Retention Battalion, compete in the 2019 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, Utah, Jan. 11. Team Alaska joined fellow Guard competitors from California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming for three days of official training and sprint and pursuit races. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)

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Alaska Air Guard Tech Sgt. Jacob Case, 168th Maintenance Squadron, competes the 2019 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, Utah, Jan. 11. Team Alaska joined fellow Guard competitors from California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming for three days of official training and sprint and pursuit races at the Wasatch Mountain State Park where the Nordic events were held during the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by 2nd Lt. Balinda O'Neal Dresel)



Alaska Air and Army Guardsmen pose for a team picture after completing the 2019 National Guard Bureau Western Regional Biathlon Competition at the Soldier Hollow Nordic Center in Midway, Utah, Jan. 12. Team Alaska joined fellow Guard competitors from California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming for three days of official training and sprint and pursuit races at the southeastern-most part of the Wasatch Mountain State Park where the Nordic events were held during the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Ariel Solomon)